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SUBJECT: Participants in Jordan-hosted Third Neighbors Conference on Iraqi Refugees Call on Iraq to Do More

REFS: A) AMMAN 868, B) 07 AMMAN 3208

**¶11. (SBU) Summary:** Jordan hosted the Third Iraqi Refugees Neighbors (host countries) Conference on November 20, bringing together representatives from Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the UN, the Arab League, and the International Red Cross/Red Crescent. Observers included the U.S., led by PRM/ANE Director Elizabeth Hopkins, the UK, EU, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The meeting provided a forum for the exchange of views and data, but produced no new initiatives or policy changes. The participants and observers instead limited themselves to reviews of new information amassed since the March 2008 conference (ref A). Host countries reaffirmed their commitment not to deport Iraqis, reported low repatriation numbers, complained about strains on their infrastructures, and repeatedly called on Iraq to do more for its displaced citizens. End summary.

Host Countries and Iraq Disagree on Repatriation Levels

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**¶12. (SBU)** In his conference intervention, Iraqi representative, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Hajj Hmoud, reported a great number of Iraqi refugees were returning as a result of improving security conditions in Iraq. Jordanian Foreign Minister Saleh Al-Bashir in his intervention, contradicted his Iraqi colleague saying that only a few hundred Iraqis had returned from Jordan. The Syrian representative reported that only 500 Iraqis had been repatriated from his country, implying that the number was not significant.

Host Countries Assert Iraq Could Ease Refugee Burden

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**¶13. (SBU)** All of the hosting countries reaffirmed their commitment not to force Iraqis to return home. However, they all highlighted the need for additional international support for refugees in their countries. Jordan's delegate, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation Secretary General Nasser Shraideh told conferees that Iraqis further strained limited resources and burdened the Jordanian infrastructure. He did not provide, however, any estimates of the annual cost or total number of Iraqi refugees living in Jordan. He called for more funding from the international community and the Government of Iraq (GOI) to sustain refugees while in Jordan

**¶14. (SBU)** The Syrian representative asserted that the SARG had immigration records proving that 1.5 million Iraqis were resident in Syria, of whom 1.1 million have been registered and processed by Syrian immigration authorities, at an estimated annual cost of USD 2 billion. While acknowledging international support, he added that GOI's assistance was "not worth mentioning."

**¶15. (SBU)** Lebanon's representative said his country hosted tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees, alleging most entered the country illegally, making the provision of assistance difficult. He added that most Iraqis lived in southern Beirut and the surrounding Palestinian refugee camps, thus straining the economically less

fortunate areas. A representative of the Lebanese Public Security Department commented that 50 percent of Iraqi refugees were Shiites, 30 percent Christians, and 20 percent Sunnis. The representative added that Iraqi refugees were allowed to work under specific conditions, including that they have an employer, support a family, and have children attending school. He made an appeal for more assistance from Iraq, saying the USD 2 million transferred to date did not meet Lebanese expectations.

Donor Contributions Will Continue; Iraq Should Do More

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¶ 16. (SBU) In their interventions, donor countries listed the efforts to assist Iraqis through resettlement, asylum, or humanitarian assistance. The EU, represented by Chief of Iraq Coordination Jobst Van Kirchmann, described its efforts through ECHO and direct assistance from the Commission. Other bilateral donors joined Syria and Jordan in calling for Iraq to play a greater role in assisting the Iraqi refugee community.

UN Focus on Minorities and Palestinian Refugees in Iraq

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¶ 17. (SBU) The UN delegation was made up of UNAMI and UNHCR staff. UNHCR Representative Radhouane Nouicer, as head of the delegation, noted the main cause of Iraqi displacement was terrorism that targeted minority religious sects. Nouicer called for the protection of Palestinian refugees in Iraq and for assistance to vulnerable refugees such as single mothers and children. He reported 306,000 Iraqi refugees had registered with UNHCR -- 221,000 in Syria and 53,000 in Jordan.

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Jordan and U.N. Praise U.S. Efforts

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¶ 18. (SBU) Nouicer said his organization had received 48,000 resettlement applications from Iraqis in MENA countries, and thanked the U.S. for accepting 15,170 refugees out of the 21,000 already settled. Shraideh also thanked the U.S. as well as the EU for assistance provided to cover Iraqi refugees' expenses. The Syrian representative neither thanked nor criticized the U.S. and said his government was willing to cooperate directly with donor governments.

On the Margins, Iraqis Remain Skeptical

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¶ 19. (SBU) EmbOffs overheard Iraqi Ambassador Saad Al-Hayani tell the UNHCR representative that estimates of Iraqi refugees in host countries were unrealistic, citing as an example the alleged 120,000 - 150,000 Iraqi refugees living in Egypt. Iraqi Deputy Minister of Human Rights Hussein Al-Zuhairi was also overheard telling the UN delegation that host countries' demands of the GOI were "radical;" he specifically criticized Jordan for taking a very long time to accept USD 8 million.

¶ 10. (U) This message has been coordinated with PRM.

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